

# Educational Deprivation in India

## A Survey of Field Investigations

Kiran Bhatta

*In spite of enshrining free and compulsory education in the directive principles of the Indian Constitution, the educational backwardness of India even after 50 years of independence is quite glaring. This paper, based on a survey of field-level investigations, addresses the issues of economic constraints, schooling quality and parental motivation as a set of possible influences determining the educational decisions within a household and contributing to the overall picture of educational deprivation at the national level.*

*The author finds an exaggerated emphasis being placed on child labour and inadequate motivation among poor parents as the major obstacles to universalisation of primary education. Rather, it is the direct costs of schooling, which impose substantial burden on families, and the low quality of schooling facilities, which reduce the child's interest in education, that primarily account for educational deprivation. In both these aspects – reducing private costs of schooling and improving schooling quality – the state has a crucial role to play. But there are few signs that the government is addressing these problems.*

*This paper appears in two parts. The first part, published here, interrogates the belief that poverty is the main cause of educational deprivation in India, and draws attention to the largely unexplored area of poor quality of schooling as an important factor affecting educational performance.*

### I Introduction

INDIA's development performance and its yet 'unleashed' potential have been the subject of much discussion and debate in policy as well as academic circles. Yet the most glaring feature of the Indian economy – its more than disturbing record in human resource development, particularly as it relates to education – continues to receive inadequate attention. While there have been numerous policy pronouncements and government programmes to alleviate the situation, the ground reality shows highly unsatisfactory progress.

At the time of the 1991 Census, almost half of the Indian population in the 7+ age group was still illiterate. The number of illiterate persons (close to half a billion) was larger than the total population of the country in 1961.<sup>1</sup> Further, illiteracy remains endemic even in the younger age groups; in 1987-88, for instance 44.4 per cent of all females in the 10-14 age group were illiterate [Dreze and Sen 1995: Table 3 of statistical appendix]. This picture of persistent illiteracy stands in sharp contrast with the directive principles of the Indian Constitution, according to which free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 should have been achieved by 1960.<sup>2</sup>

The causes of India's educational backwardness have been the subject of a number of studies based on secondary data.<sup>3</sup> In this paper an attempt is made to supplement these studies with a survey of field-based investigations.<sup>4</sup> While occasional reference will be made to secondary data, the focus is primarily on studies that are based on intensive fieldwork. These studies tend to receive comparatively little attention but they

do throw much useful light on a number of aspects of the educational situation that are not always captured in statistical analyses of secondary data. Examples of such issues include the organisational aspects of the schooling system, the perceived benefits of education, and the time allocation of children.

Earlier analyses of educational deprivation in India have often used a demand-supply framework to explain the slow progress of basic education. While it is certainly possible to associate most of the appropriate explanatory variables either with the 'supply-side' (the provision of schooling facilities) or with the 'demand side' (the utilisation of these facilities), the analogy with the standard demand-supply framework is somewhat misleading in several respects. First, education is not a homogeneous product; quality is a crucial consideration. Second, in the case of education, there is no single supply-demand equilibrium, and no well-defined price to bring demand in line with supply. Government school, for instance, charge fixed and negligible fees, and normally do not refuse new admissions; if excess demand develops, it is typically contained via the decline in the quality of education that follows from overcrowding. Third, the demand for education has an important social dimension, which can be easily overlooked in the standard demand-supply framework. Fourth, educational decisions are often made by some persons (e.g. the parents) on behalf of others (the children), a particularly important feature in the case of female education; these interpersonal issues, again, are outside the focus of standard demand-supply analysis.

For all these reasons, it may be helpful to focus on household educational decisions

(e.g. whether or not to enrol a child, or to withdraw a child from school) as the primary issue. Supply-related variables, including the quality of schooling, are easily incorporated in this framework as particular determinants of these decisions. That at any rate, is the approach used in this paper. More precisely, three determinants of educational decisions will be examined in some detail: (1) economic constraints, (2) schooling quality, (3) parental motivation. These headings do not exhaust the range of possible influences, but field studies suggest that they do capture many of the crucial considerations.

### II Poverty as a Cause of Educational Deprivation

The most widely held belief regarding India's poor educational status relates the demand for education with the poor economic status of parents. It is commonly accepted, particularly in official circles, that poor people cannot afford to send their children to school. The main 'explanation' offered is that the opportunity cost of sending them to school is very high as children make valuable contributions to the household economy. Hence, sending them to school, instead of using them as household help or wage earners, is not an economically feasible option. In addition if direct costs of education (books, stationery, uniforms, etc) are also to be borne then schooling becomes practically out of reach for the poor.

Such explanations need further probing. Is the relationship between poverty and schooling as simple and unambiguous as claimed? Is poverty the main determinant of parental decisions regarding the schooling

of children? What is the relative importance of opportunity costs and direct costs in schooling decisions? These are some of the questions that will be explored in this section.

To begin with, a look at some basic facts immediately highlights ambiguities in the presumed relationship between poverty and schooling. Several third world countries, for instance, have similar or even worse levels of poverty but much better records of mass literacy than India.<sup>5</sup> Within India itself a comparison of the poverty levels and educational achievements of, say, Kerala and Uttar Pradesh (UP) also defies the claim that it is merely poverty that prevents the poor from sending their children to school. While poverty levels, as measured by the proportion of people below the poverty line, are similar in both states (e.g., 44 per cent and 45 per cent in rural and urban Kerala in 1987-88, respectively, compared with 48 per cent and 42 per cent in rural and urban UP) educational achievements in the two states are vastly different. Kerala has an average literacy rate (7+ age group) of nearly 90 per cent whereas in Uttar Pradesh the same figure is only 40.5 per cent.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, even within Uttar Pradesh, while western UP has seen a greater increase in rural incomes (relative to its eastern counterpart) this prosperity has not resulted in a corresponding increase in literacy and education [Dreze and Gazdar 1996]. Thus, poverty is a highly inadequate explanation of regional variations in educational achievements.

There is also a fair amount of anecdotal evidence that points to the same ambiguities. Kodathuchery, a harijan village in Tamil Nadu is a particularly noteworthy example [Narayan et al 1984]. Despite the very poor economic conditions of the population — almost complete landlessness and practically no other employment opportunities — the village had achieved literacy rates of above 99 per cent for males and females in 1980. The experience of ILO's international programme on elimination of child labour (IPEC) has also shown that, even among the most impoverished families, parents are quite willing to send their children to school provided the schools function adequately [ILO 1994]. The MV Foundation in Andhra Pradesh, working with bonded labour has had similar experience [Sinha 1995].

However, this is not to deny that poverty or low income often play a role in low schooling levels. In general, poorer countries or poorer sections of the population in the same country are more likely to be found with poorer educational records. Against this general proposition, which indicates that poverty can be a potential constraint on the demand for schooling, there are notable exceptions both among countries and within India as already pointed out. These exceptions

point to the fact that the poverty constraint can be alleviated or defeated by appropriate intervention most notably by improving the provision of basic education. But before turning to this it is necessary to take a closer look at evidence from the field to assess the extent to which poverty actually acts as a decisive constraint on schooling decisions. In doing so it is useful to distinguish between two different types of costs of schooling: (1) the opportunity costs of children's time and (2) the direct costs of school attendance.

#### OPPORTUNITY COSTS OF TIME

*The issues:* There is much evidence that children of poor families often assist their parents in various household activities such as care of younger sibling, looking after cattle and poultry, collecting water and fuel, and helping on the family farm. It is also not uncommon to find children engaged in income-earning activities either at home (family-based enterprises) or outside their homes. What is less well-documented, though, is the actual amount of time spent by them on any or all of these activities and the income thus earned or saved (by freeing parents' time to pursue economic activities). To determine whether opportunity costs of time do in fact forbid schooling we must know, firstly, how much these costs amount to, i.e. how much children are actually paid or how high the returns to unpaid work; secondly, to what extent income-earning activities compete with schooling e.g. do working hours have to coincide with school hours; and thirdly, to what extent families are critically dependent on children's earnings.

Unfortunately, as things stand, there is no conclusive evidence on the role of opportunity costs of time as a determinant of enrolment in schools. However, many case studies challenge the belief that opportunity costs of time are the primary constraint on demand for schooling. Most of these have, however, only estimated the time spent, on average, by children (boys and girls separately) on 'household duties' or 'paid work'. While these studies make a significant contribution to the literature they have left some important questions unanswered: (1) they do not specify which hours during the day the child is most needed for housework or paid labour and whether those timings are inflexible and incompatible with schooling, (2) they do not give disaggregated and more precise estimates of how much time is spent by children not going to school on each kind of non-school activity,<sup>7</sup> (3) they do not report what proportion of children in the school-going age group spend time on these activities.<sup>8</sup> All this information would be useful in assessing the possible conflict between schooling and children's work.

While all the available studies state that domestic work is the most common and regular form of child work, it is hard to imagine that in a large proportion of rural households there is so much housework, rigidly time-bound, that children cannot be freed to attend a few hours of school a few days a week (bearing in mind that school hours in rural India are quite short, and that the actual number of teaching days per year is probably in the 150-180 range in most states). It would be interesting to know what proportion of rural households actually own cattle that need to be taken to graze; how much time is spent in these households on cooking; how many children in the 6-14 age group are used to collect water and fuel; what proportion of households are engaged in any household trade and why helping with the trade precludes going to school; how many mothers who work in the fields leave infants in the care of older sibling; and how many older sibling stay at home and actually 'mind' the younger sibling. In the rural areas it is common to find children left to their own devices, wandering around and playing. The catch-all of 'household duties' so often held responsible for preventing children from going to school needs to be seriously re-examined.

*Time utilisation of children:* Among the field-based studies Sajitha Bashir's (1994) study on schooling in Tamil Nadu makes a significant contribution.<sup>9</sup> The author found that unpaid household work is the most common and regular form of child labour taking up about 1-2 hours a day. Her sample showed that approximately two-thirds of all pupils, and nearly all pupils from families involved in agriculture or a household industry, spend over an hour every day on domestic duties and other work such as weaving, tending livestock, helping with family trade, etc. She also found that in rural areas girls spent on average, twice as much time working (mostly on domestic duties) as boys. And in urban areas the number of hours worked by girls was three times the corresponding figure for boys.

Another study that provides evidence of the time use pattern of work among children was done by Shireen Jejeebhoy and Sumati Kulkarni (1989) in rural Maharashtra. They found that "while a large proportion of children do help out, not much time is devoted to these activities" [Jejeebhoy and Kulkarni 1989:110].<sup>10</sup> In terms of person days of work put in by the average child in a year, they estimated that up to the age of 10 years the average amount of time spent was 19 days for boys and 34 days for girls. For the slightly older age group of 10-14 years this increases to about 60 days for boys and 105 days for girls.<sup>11</sup> Also up to the age of 15 most of this time is spent on non-earning activities in the home. Hence, while it is acknowledged that



most children do in fact help out in some form, they neither contribute substantial time nor does the nature of their assistance imply much income generation for the household. It is only after the age of 15 that children begin to make substantial contributions – four months for the average boy and 5.5 months for the average girl.<sup>12</sup>

In a study of rural Karnataka, Ramesh Kanbargi, and P M Kulkarni found that "working for wages is significant among children in the 12-14 age group" [Kanbargi and Kulkarni 1991:137]. While boys in the 5-7 age group could be found working for about two hours per day on various activities, in the older age group of 12-14 years, they worked for more than five hours a day. The authors do not however, clarify what these activities are in either age group. They do point out, though, that girls work for longer hours in all age groups.

B M Dinesh (1988) who has studied three villages in Karnataka, also reports similar results. He found that on average, 6-14 year old children spent 3.2 hours a day on "household activities".<sup>13</sup>

Arup Maharatha in his study on children's work activities in West Bengal has distinguished between the peak season and the slack season corresponding to the agricultural calendar in terms of the hours of productive work (off-farm wage employment or family farm work) done by children.<sup>14</sup> He reports that young male children (5-9 years) do less than one-and-a-half hours a day of productive work during the peak period and even less during the slack period. Female children he found do negligible amounts of directly productive work. Domestic and productive work taken together for male and female children in this age group, accounts for less than four hours a day on average in the peak season and two hours a day in the slack period. He also states that children do not "appear to be of much help in relieving adult members (particularly adult females) of their household responsibilities" [Maharatha 1996:16]. Nor do his findings support the hypothesis that children's involvement in domestic work allows adults to take up income-earning activities. He has found no correlation between children's time spent on domestic duties and adult's time spent on directly productive work (p 15).

Jeemol Unni based on her study in Gujarat, concludes that "the overall work participation of children is not very high, 8 per cent among boys and 9.4 per cent among girls" [Unni 1996:8]. She found that only 10 per cent of girl children reported being engaged in household activity and even that mainly in the 12-14 years age-group.

A study by V Ramachandran in a 'relatively progressive pocket' of Tamil Nadu also supports the hypothesis that children

contribute very little time in the household or agricultural economy. He found that while child workers constitute 10 per cent of the workforce, the actual work done by them constituted only 2 per cent of total labour time deployed in agricultural and non-agricultural activity [Ramachandran 1990:135].

In a recent study conducted under the auspices of the UNDP research programme for human development, Srivastava found, in two districts of Uttar Pradesh (Ballia and Rampur), that "the problem of ...children's involvement in paid/unpaid work is much more significant for older children (10-14 years) and for girls (generally unpaid domestic work)" [Srivastava 1997:36]. Among the 5-9 year olds, he found that in Rampur, 12.9 per cent boys and 24.9 per cent girls did mainly unpaid domestic work while only 1.4 per cent boys and 0.9 per cent girls were involved in any income-earning activity. In Ballia on the other hand, 15.8 per cent boys and 34.7 per cent girls, in the same age group, were involved in unpaid domestic work, while 1.8 per cent boys and 1.6 per cent girls were involved in paid work. An important part of domestic work that is often cited as effecting enrolment is the burden of dependants, especially younger siblings, passed on to the children. Using three different variables to measure the burden of dependants, Srivastava has found that in fact they do not show any systematic relationship between total or even female enrolment rates [Srivastava 1997:18].

A similar study by Majumdar in Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu, also shows that "...work participation rate among the children of this category [5-14-year old] is not very high." In a footnote she states that "interestingly, despite the absence of mandatory schooling laws, the opportunity costs of child's time is not a major factor deterring their school attendance at this age level" [Majumdar 1997:11].<sup>16</sup>

Jabbi and Rajyalakshmi's study in Bihar shows that "of the children that did not go to school, some of them worked either at home or outside and earned some wages. However, the number of these children was very small" [Jabbi and Rajyalakshmi 1997:5]. In Dumka district they found that about 10-11 per cent of the children worked for wages while in Bhojpur only 2-3 per cent did so. And while most worked for about 1-2 hours a day, some were found working for 7-8 hours a day. However, a majority of those who worked earned less than Rs 10 a day.

Another statistic that raises similar questions is the discrepancy between the number of working and school-going children. According to the 1981 Census 76.6 million of the 158.8 million children in the 6-14 age group were attending school. By contrast the number of child labourers in

the 5-15 age group is only 17.4 million [NSS data 1983], which leaves a stupendous 64 million children not accounted for. Even if one uses the Operation Research Group's much quoted figure of 44 million child workers, 38 million children are still missing.

Taken together, these studies strongly suggest that opportunity costs of children's time tend to be high only after the primary school age. If so, they cannot on their own, explain high rates of non-enrolment at the primary stage.

*Child labour, poverty and land ownership:* Kanbargi and Kulkarni (1991) have pointed out that ownership of productive assets generally increases the demand for child work. This is an important finding, as it introduces a caveat in the assumption that poverty forces children to work; a point which is echoed in other studies as well. For instance, Bashir notes, "if higher income is associated with ownership of more land, cattle or other assets, the employment of which requires use of more labour, it is possible for the demand for child labour to increase with household income and wealth...However, in the case of high income families in the non-agricultural sector, where there is security of tenure, work is not seasonal and workers are entitled to earned and sick leave, higher household income does not translate into higher opportunity costs of time for children because there is little demand for child labour either as a substitute for adult labour or as wage labour" [Bashir 1994].

Both these studies [Kanbargi and Kulkarni 1991; Bashir 1994] also highlight the crucial role of agriculture in the rural economy and its relationship with the demand for child labour. In this context it is important to bear in mind that the demand for child labour as unpaid family help shows quite different patterns in landowning and landless families. In land owning families it varies directly with the size of landholding up to a point where it becomes economical to substitute child labour with hired labour.<sup>17</sup> It is perhaps pertinent to bear in mind that the labour market in agriculture has hardly any demand for child labour, except perhaps in a few specific activities such as transplanting of rice, harvesting and grazing cattle. Children are more likely to be employed (as family help) in productive work in households that own land than in those that don't own land. Not having land or cattle (as in the case of the poor) greatly reduces the demand for children for productive work.

Bashir (1994) also reports that "no pupil whose father/guardian was employed in the organised private sectors or abroad as a skilled worker, clerical or professional reported doing paid labour at any time. Nor did they report absenteeism to do house work." While this observation may partly

reflect the higher earnings of parents with organised sector employment, it is consistent with the notion of a positive link between child labour and land ownership.

Jabbi and Rajyalakshmi (1997) found in Bihar that children of parents employed in service jobs were most likely to be enrolled in school, followed by children of cultivators. Non-agricultural workers' children were least likely to be enrolled, although those of agricultural workers had only marginally better enrolment rates.

Jeemol Unni found in Gujarat that "a higher proportion of children from predominantly non-agricultural households attended schools as compared with those from agricultural households" [Unni 1996:6].<sup>18</sup> She also found that the "proxy for wealth (value of assets) and composition of household income did not influence boys schooling but had a positive impact on the education of girls" [Unni 1996:15]. For children taken together it does not show a positive relationship at all, implying that poverty by itself does not have a major impact on schooling.

In a survey of rural households in Maharashtra, Vlassoff (1979) found that richer households could provide "more opportunities for children to contribute productively...while poor villagers did not possess sufficient resources to take advantage of potential family labour". A study in Uttar Pradesh by the Giri Institute of Development Studies [Asraf 1989] also found that drop-outs do not bear a clear relationship with per capita income levels of the household.

On the other hand, in Srivastava (1997) an analysis of the relation between asset ownership and work participation of non-enrolled shows that, while in Rampur there was no "systematic relation between such involvement and asset status", in Ballia the percentage of children involved in work increases systematically from the high to low asset group categories.

Similarly, Majumdar's study of Kanyakumari district in Tamil Nadu shows that "almost all the never-enrolled...come from households with marginal [land]holdings." Among households with land, it notes, "there is a positive, though weak, relationship between land size and educational participation of children" [Majumdar 1997:13].

Anuradha Pande's (1996) study in the hills of Uttar Pradesh (Uttarakhand) adds yet another dimension to the impact of local economy on child labour. She points to the fact that receding forest cover implies that women have to travel longer distances to collect firewood and fodder. This increased burden is then invariably passed on to the children increasing their opportunity of time.

A compilation of field reports (from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and

Rajasthan) by Sinha and Sinha (1995) provides insights into the state of the education system in some of the more remote and poorer parts of the country. They found that in several villages despite high levels of poverty there was practically no dependence on child labour. One such village was Kanji in Purnia (Bihar), where even the poorest scheduled caste community, the musahars, were found not to put their children to work. Interestingly, they did not send them to school either. In Salana and Saikot villages of Chamoli district (UP), on the other hand, while no child labour was reported, almost all the children were enrolled. They conclude that the "dependence on child labour varies a great deal between different villages, even at similar levels of poverty depending on the nature of the local economy" [Sinha and Sinha 1995:9].

The preceding observations, linking child labour in rural areas to land ownership and the agricultural cycle, qualify the notion that child labour is simply a reflection of poverty. They also have specific policy implications. For instance, they point to the possible usefulness of integrating the school calendar with the agricultural cycle. Current school timings show little awareness of this possibility. To illustrate, for much of the rabi harvest, final exams are held during the peak season (late April and early May), while the period of low activity coincides with the summer vacation (mid-May to mid-July). While improved timings may have to be region-specific, much can be done to harmonise school timings with agricultural activity.

*Child labour as a default activity:* The study by Kanbargi and Kulkarni mentioned earlier concludes that children spend about four hours a day on average in household or productive work, but "income and related variables do not seem to have any direct significant effect on children's work input" [Kanbargi and Kulkarni 1991:153]. This suggests that while the magnitude of child work in terms of time spent may be substantial, their contribution to family income is not so substantial, i.e., it is not a financial imperative that forces children to work. This in turn points to the possibility that children are often put to work, as a deterrent to idling, rather than as an economic necessity. This possibility is also emphasised in Nidhi Mehrotra's work (cited next) and in Tim Dyson's analysis of the demand for children.<sup>19</sup>

Nidhi Mehrotra (1995) who has collected field-based information from Kerala, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh, notes that parents are often found to use the labour of their children, *ex post* following their dropping out of school, for reasons totally unconnected with opportunities for work. Hence evidence of their working does not

by itself establish that poverty is the prime reason for their not attending school.<sup>19</sup>

B M Dinesh (1988) also found that nearly 20 per cent of boys and 26 per cent of girls in Karnataka did not go to school and neither did they engage in any income-earning activity. In fact, 60 per cent of the boys and 43 per cent of the girls from this group did not even do household chores. Pandey and Talwar (1980) in a study in Uttar Pradesh found that of the children of school-going age not going to school, 80 per cent were reported as 'non-workers'.<sup>20</sup>

Evidence of child labour as a default activity is also reported by NGOs and district administrators, working in the field, as revealed by the following quotes:

...some children are sent to work by the parents because of poverty in the family... In some cases, it is found that children drop out of the school because of lack of interest in studies and as they have nothing else to do and there being an opportunity of employment in these match units, the children are sent to match units for work... [L. Krishnan (1996), 'Child Labour of Sivakasi' (mimeo), district collectorate, Ramanathapuram, forthcoming in *Administrator*].

The study revealed that (1) 34 per cent children work due to peer pressure, (2) 30 per cent work due to parental pressure, (3) 64 per cent of the children work as they have

nothing else to do as the schools are not very attractive and teaching conditions are poor

(4) only 6 per cent of the parents felt education was important for development. [CINI-Asha (1996), 'Our Present Day Understanding of the Child Labour Issues' (mimeo), Calcutta, forthcoming in *Administrator*, emphasis added; based on a survey in Dhobiatolla, Calcutta, January 1993.]

When child is idle it is essential to put them to work [CINI-Asha (1996), 'Our Present Day Understanding of the Child Labour Issues' (mimeo), Calcutta, forthcoming in *Administrator*, based on a survey in Dhobiatolla, Calcutta, January 1993.]

This is what fathers reported in focus-group discussions.

A general dissatisfaction with the education system encourages parents to send their children to work rather than to school. The opinion that the completion of school will not ensure or enhance employment prospects is widely held [K Usha (1996), 'Child Labour in the Silk Weaving Industry' (mimeo), LBSNAA, forthcoming in *Administrator*].

*Child labour and drop-out patterns:*

Another significant finding of Mehrotra's (1995) study was "that most children who drop out of primary school did so in the early grades". This is also an important indirect indication of the relationship between child labour and non-attendance. If child labour were the main reason for dropping out, we would not expect dropping out to be concentrated in the early grades. This is



because, as we saw earlier, child labour is relatively unimportant at young ages. Labour-driven drop-out rates are more likely to be low in the early grades, and to rise significantly around the ages when children become more productive.

Contrary to this prediction, several studies support the notion that drop-out tends to be heavily concentrated in grades 1 and 2. Seethuraman and Usha Devi (1985) found that 35 per cent of children in Karnataka dropped out in grades 1 and 2. Also in Karnataka, Nayan Tara (1985) reports a drop-out rate of 31 per cent in grade 1.<sup>21</sup>

Official enrolment data also depict the same pattern of high drop-out rates in the lower grades. It needs to be borne in mind though that if enrolment data is taken from school records only; there may be a bias introduced because of the phenomenon of over-reporting enrolment in the early grades, particularly in grade 1. Drop-outs in grades 1 (even 2) could then be an overestimate and not an accurate measure of the real attrition in those grades.

**Substitutability between child and adult labour:** In the literature on surplus-labour countries, such as India, it has often been argued that with suitable reorganisation, labour can be withdrawn from agriculture without any loss of production. A similar argument may apply to child labour within the household, i.e. it may be possible to rearrange labour allocation to release children for schooling.

Two findings from Arup Maharatna's study provide support for this argument. Firstly, that during the slack period adults devote a lot more time to domestic chores, and correspondingly children devote less time, implying a degree of substitutability in the domestic sphere. Secondly, he notes that the existence of surplus labour-hours for adult members indicates the possibility that adults can do "a large part of what children are made to do" [Maharatna 1996: 15]. As a result he concludes that "a large part of child labour could probably be replaced by a better utilisation of existing labour hours" [Maharatna 1996: 18].<sup>22</sup> As Caldwell et al note, "except in periods of peak labour demand, children under the age of 12 years [now] find it difficult to secure paid daily work" [Caldwell et al 1985: 33].

This raises the possibility of a divergence between social and private opportunity costs, insofar as a reduction of child labour raises adult employment and wages. Even if the demand for schooling is constrained by a consideration of high private opportunity costs, the social opportunity costs of inefficient allocation of resources (labour) is surely a concern that warrants attention of policy-makers.

**Assessment:** Summing up the evidence on opportunity costs of time, what emerges is

that the interconnections between poverty, child labour and schooling are more complex than has been acknowledged so far in the literature. In particular, the common notion that poor parents cannot afford to send their children to school because they rely on their earnings for survival has to be qualified in a number of ways. First, school hours are short so that schooling is not incompatible with a certain amount of productive work. Second, the economic returns to child labour remain uncertain particularly when it comes to unpaid household work. Third, a number of recent studies suggest that the number of hours devoted to productive work by children who are not attending school tends to be relatively small, even in poor villages (though there are some exceptions, e.g. during periods of peak agricultural activity). Fourth, whatever work is performed by non-attending children during school hours can often be done at other times. Fifth, in many households there is also scope for substitution of work between different household members. Sixth, when children are absorbed to work, it does not necessarily follow that they have had to give up schooling due to the demand of work; it is also possible that they have dropped out school for other reasons and are taking up productive work by default. Finally, it should be remembered that reliance on child labour, such as it is, is not simply a reflection of the poverty of the household; other household characteristics such as, land ownership may also be relevant.

Opportunity cost of time does seem to play a more decisive role, however, in the schooling of girls. Female children are reported to spend a greater amount of time, at least on household duties,<sup>23</sup> and hence the opportunity costs of educating them are perceived to be higher, relative to male children. In effect this only serves to reinforce social attitudes which do not regard education of girls a necessity.<sup>24</sup>

The issues discussed in this section are far from settled and there is much need for further empirical evidence on different interconnections between poverty, child labour and schooling. Careful studies of the time utilisation of children would be useful.

#### DIRECT COST

**Magnitude of direct costs:** Since government schools do not charge any tuition fees, at least at the primary level, direct costs have received less attention in the literature. However, there is increasing evidence of the fact that expenditure on books, stationery, clothes and related items, and even cash payments in the form of exam fees, sports fee, etc. could add up to a fair amount. For a family with several children of school-going age, the direct costs of sending all of them to school can easily be unaffordable.

The role of direct schooling costs as cause of non-enrolment has been emphasised by Mehrotra's study, cited earlier. The author's research in Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Kerala shows that often it is the "inability to meet direct costs (which includes fees, cost of textbooks and other writing materials, etc) which compels parents to withdraw children from school" [Mehrotra 1995: 6]. Almost all the schools in her sample charged fees in some form.

Several other studies also highlight the importance of direct schooling costs. The report by Sinha and Sinha (1995) has information from 17 schools on direct costs of education. In these schools, they found that the annual costs could be anywhere between Rs 90 and Rs 380.<sup>25</sup> According to a study by the Madras Institute of Development Studies (1970-71) private costs (on books, stationery, etc) could add up to 40 per cent of institutional costs.<sup>26</sup> Bhagwati (1973) also found that direct costs, more than income foregone by attending school, were stated as a significant factor in schooling decisions.

Tilak, using NSSO (1986-87, 42nd Round) data on 'Participation in Education', reports the following: (1) "a sizeable number of students do not receive primary education free in contrast to the claims made by the government..." (2) "A large number of students pay tuition fees, exam fees and other fees, even in government primary schools..." [Tilak 1995: 57]. Specifically, Tilak claims that 14.4 per cent students in rural areas and 49 per cent in urban areas pay tuition fees in addition to other fees and non-fee expenses. In conclusion, he states that "households spend large sums of money on acquiring primary education" [Tilak 1995: 57].

A study by Panchmukhi (1990)<sup>28</sup> in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Rajasthan, also shows that household expenditure on elementary education even in government schools is not negligible. Panchmukhi has found that these expenditures could range from Rs 385 per student per year in Maharashtra, and Rs 810 in Rajasthan to nearly Rs 1,200 in Karnataka. Of this total expenditure the corresponding figures for fees were found to be up to Rs. 60, Rs 244 and Rs 320, respectively.<sup>29</sup>

The studies done under the UNDP-GOI research programme also provide evidence of the fact that the direct costs of schooling, even at the primary level, often add up to substantial amounts imposing a burden on poor families especially if there is more than one school-going child in the family.<sup>30</sup> For example, Debi's (1997) study in Orissa notes that private tuitions greatly inflate the expenditure on schooling, even though the schools themselves are not fee-charging. However, because of "negligence of regular

teaching and absence of teachers in the school", parents are forced to resort to private tuitions.

All these studies seriously bring into question the constitutional provision of providing 'free' education to all up to the age of 14.<sup>31</sup>

**Role of school meals and other incentives:** In order to ameliorate the situation the government has instituted several schemes to enable children from deprived families to attend school. Prominent among these are the mid-day meal scheme, free uniforms and books, and scholarships for the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe students. While in some cases the schemes have met with reasonable success in increasing enrolment, in several other instances the benefits are found not to have reached the beneficiaries. One such case is reported by Bashir (1994) in Tamil Nadu, where free textbooks are provided by the government but remain at the block headquarters because no one collects them from there.

Bashir et al (1993), in a survey of three districts in Uttar Pradesh also found that while the materials supplied under Operation Blackboard were available in the majority of the schools, most of them were lying locked up in trunks, cupboards, or at the head teacher's residence.

Tilak (1995), on the basis of NSSO (1987-88) data found that financial incentives (i.e., scholarships) were available to a very small fraction of students - 1.3 per cent in urban schools and 2.4 per cent in rural schools. This, he notes, is despite the Education Commission's (1996) recommendation that at least 5 per cent of enrolled students at the primary stage should get scholarships by 1985-86.

Majumdar also found in Tamil Nadu that while free uniforms are supplied in government elementary schools, they often fail to reach the beneficiaries on time, "forcing parents to spend out of their own pockets for this purpose" [Majumdar 1997: 29].

The effects of the mid-day meal programmes or other food related schemes are reported to have been better. For instance, data collected from a village in Tamil Nadu by Suresh Chandra Babu and Arne Hallam (1989) shows that the school nutrition programme has resulted in a significant reduction in household poverty and inequality, and also in a significant increase in enrolment and continuation of education beyond primary levels.

Sinha and Sinha (1995) also report on the positive impact of the school meal programmes from various parts of the country (where the scheme has been effectively introduced). According to their observations, enrolment and attendance rates in all these areas have shown dramatic increases. In Paliyavillage of Raigarh district, in particular,

local teachers and residents reported that the mid-day meal scheme resulted in a jump in attendance rates from 20 per cent to 80 per cent in grades 1 and 2.

An alternate view however is provided by Rukmini Banerji (1996), who draws attention to the hardship caused by the direct cost component of schooling. She compares the benefits of the mid-day meal programme with that of providing free textbooks, uniforms or scholarships, and concludes that the latter are more welcome, as meals are easier to provide for out of the family's daily consumption of food, but making cash payments for books, etc., is more difficult - money being a scarcer resource. This comparison between cash and in kind support, however, remains somewhat ambiguous since the size of the income transfers is not the same in both cases.

**Assessment:** To sum up, the evidence presented by these studies suggest that while opportunity costs of time by themselves are not the main stumbling block, in conjunction with direct costs, poverty could play a discouraging role.

However, given the fact that the benefits, particularly, in the long run are widely acknowledged, even among the poorest sections of the population, it is hard to imagine that schooling decisions are made solely on the basis of short-run costs. Long-term benefits must also figure somewhere in the decision-making even of the poor. For the poorest, it is imaginable that short-term costs could mean survival, but even excluding this group, there is a huge section of the population that is obviously discounting the benefits of education. Why? Clearly, the education that is being offered is not perceived as beneficial enough, or at least not worth the expense. A closer look at the quality aspect is therefore crucial.

### III

#### Quality of Primary Education as a Cause of Educational Deprivation

While experts admit that the quality, particularly of government schools is poor, little explanation is offered for why it is so. In most studies on the status of schooling, quality is considered almost as a constant on the supply-side, while poverty continues to be cited as the main determinant and bottleneck on the demand side. Hence efforts to increase the spread of education have concentrated almost exclusively on either increasing the quantity of schools or on setting up endless schemes to provide 'incentives' to deprived sections of the population to enable them to attend.<sup>32</sup> Little thought is given to the impact that quality of schooling has on the demand for schooling and hence to improving the quality of the schools that exist.

The quality of a school depends on a variety of factors, including (1) the physical infrastructure (building, classrooms, teaching aids, water and toilet facilities, etc), (2) the size, competence and motivation of the teaching staff, (3) the organisational and managerial factors, that determine the effectiveness with which resources are utilised.<sup>33</sup> While there may be disagreement on the relative importance of each of these aspects, it cannot be denied that certain minimum standards have to be met in order to create an acceptable environment in which learning can take place. Thus, every school should have a pucca building that does not leak in the monsoons, separate classrooms for separate grades, sufficient light and air inside the classrooms, one teacher for each grade, usable toilet facilities, safe drinking water, and basic teaching aids such as blackboard and chalk, and reading and writing material in usable form. Equally importantly, minimum teaching standards include the regular presence of teachers in classrooms during teaching hours and a minimum achievement level of the pupils, at the least. Sadly, there is overwhelming evidence that only a small proportion of schools in India meet these very basic requirements.<sup>34</sup>

According to the fifth all-India education survey for instance, (1) barely half of all primary schools in India have a pucca building, (2) 42 per cent have a single classroom (if any), (3) just over half have a usable blackboard, (4) less than half have any drinking water facilities, (5) only 16 per cent have urinals, (6) more than 60 per cent have only one or two teachers in position (if any), and only 15 per cent have more than four teachers.<sup>35</sup> This picture of appalling neglect of the schooling infrastructure is amply corroborated by field investigations, as shown below.

#### PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Govinda and Varghese in their study of 59 schools in Madhya Pradesh made the following observation, encapsulating the general situation of schools in the country:

A visit to these schools in rural areas was quite revealing. In most cases students belonging to different grades are grouped together. They sit together either in a classroom or outside the so-called school building which, in any case, is poorly ventilated and with no sufficient lighting. Many of the students may not have textbooks or, at times, writing materials. The teachers try to teach these children in one way or another [Govinda and Varghese 1993: 58].

Their study revealed that 64 per cent of the schools from their sample did not have separate classrooms for different grades, and 17 per cent did not even have a school building. Thirty per cent did not have any drinking water facilities, and none of the



schools in the rural areas had piped water. The study revealed further that only 42 per cent of the schools had a blackboard and only 17 per cent had a library.

Govinda and Varghese note two important points regarding the provision of infrastructural facilities in schools: (1) schools with higher grades attached to them have better facilities relative to schools with only primary sections, (2) the size of the school, i.e., student enrolment, is a significant determinant of the status of facilities made available to a school.<sup>36</sup> Some serious implications of these facts are immediately obvious. Primary schooling, it appears, is being systematically neglected in favour of higher levels of schooling, and similarly, schools in rural areas, which are typically smaller in terms of student enrolment, are being neglected for larger typically urban schools. Ironically, to meet any of the very laudable objectives of education policy, it is precisely the reverse that needs to be done. It is the primary schools especially in the rural areas that need an impetus and all the support they can get if universal literacy (at the minimum) and especially education for all is to be achieved.

In rural Uttar Pradesh Dreze and Gazdar found that while most of the sample schools had dilapidated buildings, not a single school made full use of their building. In fact, they note, "the most commonly-used part of the building was the veranda, where children of all grades were huddled together" [Dreze and Gazdar 1996: 66]. The minimal resources that were available were also being poorly utilised. Most buildings were found to be bare barring a table and chair for the headmaster. In several cases the furniture allotted to the school had moved to the homes of the headman, teacher or other influential persons in the village.

Rukmini Banerji (1995) in her study of a low income area in Delhi, reports that most schools "lack even the basic physical facilities". None have toilet or drinking water facilities, some were housed in tents and some were without boundary walls.

In Bihar, Jabbi and Rajyalakshmi (1997) found that in Dumka district none of the schools had any toilets, laboratories, library or even furniture. Some did not even have a blackboard or books.

On infrastructure in schools, Nidhi Mehrotra (1995) also reports that "almost all schools left much to be desired". Classes were commonly held in verandas or open spaces (with the exception of Kerala); the rooms that existed were often used as office space or for storage purposes; in the districts surveyed in Uttar Pradesh (Allahabad and Pithoragarh) not one school had a classroom for every grade; children sat on worn out mats or strips of sack cloth brought from home (again Kerala, where benches were

provided, was the exception); inside the rooms lighting was inadequate; only one school in the entire sample had electricity though all the villages had electricity connections; teaching aides, blackboards, chalk, etc., were in short supply; drinking water and toilet facilities were unavailable almost everywhere.

Sinha and Sinha (1995) found that only 9 per cent of the sample schools in their report had benches and chairs; 59 per cent had blackboards (after Operation Blackboard); only 39 per cent had government provision for purchase of chalk (in all other cases the teachers had to buy chalk from their own resources or with collections from students); 13 per cent had toilets; 16 per cent had teaching materials.

Prasad (1987) in his study of rural Andhra Pradesh, found that in most schools (that had a building) the only facilities available were blackboards embossed on the walls (which were made of stone and unusable as the paint had peeled off); a few dust-laden, torn and tattered maps/charts which were either hung on walls or lay rolled in a corner, obviously not in use; record boxes to keep school records (records more than a year old were torn or moth eaten, others were stuffed together with broken clips along with the personal belongings of the teacher); chalk pieces (there were several exceptions to this where teachers were found teaching without chalk).

#### MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOLS

Management of schools has in recent years acquired prominence in discussions on the quality of education. In particular, the merits and demerits of private versus public provision of schooling has taken centre stage in this debate. But we will not enter into this debate here, concentrating instead on reports from the field on quality of management in government schools.

Govinda and Varghese (1993) in their study of primary schools in Madhya Pradesh have singled out the influence of headmasters in the organisation and management of schools. They report that none of the headmasters they encountered possessed even the minimum prescribed qualifications and training (small schools in remote areas often function without a headmaster with one of the teachers taking over the administrative tasks of the school).<sup>37</sup> Seniority appears to be the only consideration, with leadership qualities or managerial/organisational abilities playing no role at all in the selection or promotion of teachers to posts of senior teacher or headmaster. As a result the organisation of work in a school is woefully neglected. This has disastrous consequences in small schools particularly in remote areas which are in special need of good organisational skills to establish

quality schools that will draw pupils to them. However, personal observations by Govinda and Varghese revealed that no calendar of activities is adhered to in government schools (though a "notional calendar" exists for the government authorities) and in 60 per cent of the schools a flexible schedule is adopted on a daily basis.

Prasad's (1987) observations in Andhra Pradesh are even more alarming. The author reveals the following instances of school mismanagement. One was run by a mechanic and his wife (the school had practically no facilities – the teacher was teaching without chalk, and the couple spent more time trying to transfer to a school closer to the road than teaching); another by a quack who ran the school only twice a week as he had shifted residence to a nearby village to establish his medical practice there; and a third by a headmaster who maintained enrolment and attendance records for children who were all enrolled in private schools and who paid him something at the end of the year to issue transfer certificates so as to enable them to appear in the public examination.<sup>38</sup>

In Bashir's opinion one of the reasons for the poor quality of schools in Tamil Nadu is the rapid increase in the provision of public schooling facilities in the last decade. As a consequence of this, resources particularly of support services have had to be spread out more thinly, resulting in a lowering of standards. In particular, she cites the example of inspection services and monitoring of student achievement, which, not having increased in the same order, are inadequate and unable to cope with the expansion. She also points out that "In most primary schools, they [management] perform the full range of teaching duties in addition to administrative and clerical duties. This organisational feature contributes to reducing effective teaching time and also leaves little time for academic supervision" [Bashir 1994: 35].

#### QUALITY OF TEACHERS AND TEACHING PRACTICES

*Teacher motivation and accountability:* Dreze and Gazdar's study describes the problem of chronic teacher absenteeism in Uttar Pradesh. They found in their sample of schools that the teachers were present only 30 per cent of the time they were required to. In several instances they found that the school had been closed without prior notice "because the teacher(s) had decided to engage in some other activity" [Dreze and Gazdar 1996: 67]. They also found that most schools functioned for less than the stipulated hours. In effect they ran (on average) for under three hours a day. Teachers regularly came late (at around 10 am instead of the official time of 9.30 am) and left early (after the lunch break at 12.30 instead of at the closing

time of 3.30). In most cases they found that schools did not reconvene at all after the lunch break at 12:30 in the afternoon.

As far as teaching practices are concerned Dreze and Gazdar report the following:

In fact, no active teaching was taking place in any one of the 15 sample schools at the time of our visit. When they were present at all, the teachers in the sample schools were found to be engaged in one or more of the following activities: supervising children; playing cards; talking with each other; talking with visitors (other than ourselves); reading comics; preparing rolls for the forthcoming election of the management committee of a local credit co-operative (1996: 68).

The most alarming fact noted by the authors is that according to local perceptions "teaching standards in government schools have significantly deteriorated during the last 2-3 decades...The extent of teacher absenteeism and shirking has dramatically increased over this period and shows no sign of improvement" (Dreze and Gazdar 1996: 75).

Jabbi and Rajyalakshmi made similar observations in Bihar. They note that, "teacher absenteeism was reported as very high. Group teaching was resorted to and co-ordination among teachers perpetuated their absenteeism" (Jabbi and Rajyalakshmi 1997: 5). In his study in Andhra Pradesh, Prasad (1987) found that the majority of teachers encountered by him were 'disinterested' (i.e., not interested in teaching). Typically they had very irregular attendance; did not identify with the village or its people and showed lack of commitment or initiative in their job.<sup>39</sup>

On teaching practices, Sinha and Sinha also report that "there are serious grievances regarding teacher absenteeism and lack of devotion and accountability from almost all the districts but less from some of the hill districts of Uttar Pradesh" (Sinha and Sinha 1995: 16).

Ashraf on the basis of a study conducted by the Giri Institute in Uttar Pradesh notes that teachers and headmasters from the same village tend to attract and retain students much more than if they are from another village. "Attendance was found to be high and drop-outs low in schools with a local headmaster and attendance low and drop-out quite high in the schools where headmaster came from a distance" (Ashraf 1989: 14).

**Teaching environment:** In Govinda and Varghese's sample of schools (urban and rural) 56 per cent did not have one teacher per grade. In rural areas they note that "...multi-grade teaching is almost the norm" (Govinda and Varghese 1993: 71). While it has been argued that government-managed schools have to follow norms that dictate a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:40 for teacher

deployment, they found several schools with more than 100 or 200 pupils but with insufficient teachers. As far as quality of teachers is concerned they encountered an overwhelming number of underqualified, untrained or insufficiently trained teachers. Most commonly a mix of trained and untrained teachers was found.

Prasad (1987) found several instances of malpractices by teachers, related to enrolment and attendance. Teachers did not take attendance for 2-3 weeks at a stretch and often visited the school only 2-3 times a week. As a result they filled in the attendance register as they liked, manipulating the records to show more than 60 per cent attendance. Actual attendance, as noted by Prasad, was only 20-30 per cent, with instances of even less than 10 per cent in some schools. Further, he notes that according to government stipulations a single-teacher school must have 40 students and a two-teacher school must maintain a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:40. If not, the school faces threat of closure or the teacher a punishment transfer. As a result he found that it was quite common to over-report enrolment. Similarly, the government's drive for enrolment has led to fudged enrolment in some cases as a matter of policy.

Sinha and Sinha (1995) report that only 38 per cent of the teachers in the schools surveyed were found to be graduates or postgraduates (though 91 per cent had teacher training).<sup>40</sup> They also found that in most cases the teacher-pupil ratio was appalling due to a combination of (i) high average pupil-teacher ratios and (ii) uneven distribution of teachers between schools.

Bashir et al found that only 10 per cent of the teachers in UP reported using any teaching aids other than the prescribed textbooks [Bashir et al 1993: 64]. Bashir's (1994) study shows that while almost all schools in Tamil Nadu have received various inputs under the Operation Blackboard scheme, it has made little difference to the instructional quality in government schools. An evaluation of phase I of Operation Blackboard (OB), revealed that only 11 per cent of teachers were aware of OB teaching aids and most did not know how to use the aids.<sup>41</sup> "Much of the supplementary reading material had been supplied in English and could not be used by the teachers, many of whom had only 10 years of schooling" [Bashir 1994: 22].

Banerji (1995) in her survey in a low income area in Delhi found that all schools complained of a serious shortage of teachers. According to one principal, one year, they had 600 children in the charge of four teachers! Teachers and principals of the secondary schools in the area claim that the students graduating from the primary schools do not have even the basic literacy and

numeracy skills required to deal with the secondary curriculum.

#### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In this context, it might be pertinent to say that while there may be disagreement on the relative importance of factors influencing the quality of education, motivation of the teacher is generally agreed to be of primary importance. It is quite conceivable that a dedicated teacher could impart the three Rs and much more to a bunch of pupils under a tree. Equally an indifferent teacher not concerned about what the pupils learn or do not learn, though teaching in a proper classroom with running water in the toilet, can still cause half of them to drop out and the rest to stagnate or learn little.

Equally though, it cannot be denied that given the motivation of the teacher (which includes her/his presence in school for the full day) and basic academic qualifications, infrastructure becomes important specially if the number of students in a class is large and there is multi-grade teaching. Infrastructure is also important to keep the teacher motivated. An otherwise motivated teacher can lose her/his drive and enthusiasm if the school environment is depressing and the management frustrating.

Similarly, basic teaching aids and incentive schemes are also important, but while a free lunch may attract students it is not a substitute for teaching, which is what is lacking. In fact as Govinda and Varghese found, quality of teachers is unrelated to the level of infrastructural facilities available in the school. They did not find even a single school in their sample among those with relatively better infrastructural facilities where all the teachers were trained.

The main point, too often ignored, is that the human element in teaching is basic. It involves the teachers as well as the management. True dedication does not need crutches, but that kind of dedication cannot be assumed specially on a large-scale and in the prevailing circumstances. Therefore it needs to be generated or stimulated through a consciousness of duty that must be reasonably well performed. This implies instituting a system of accountability that ensures basic performance. The group most directly affected by teacher performance (or school quality in general) are the parents and therefore any system for ensuring proper functioning of schools must involve them on a regular basis.<sup>42</sup>

Another aspect of policy relates to the structure of public expenditure on education. In the present context the very low priority given to teacher training is of particular relevance. Bashir (1992) shows that in 1990-91, in Tamil Nadu about 90 per cent of recurrent expenditure was on teacher salaries and 7 per cent on books, uniforms,



etc. with virtually no provision for improving teacher inputs. Similar expenditure patterns apply at the all-India level [Dreze and Sen 1995, Chapter 6].

The NIRD review of Phase-I of Operation Blackboard [reported in Bashir 1994] also noted that expenditure constraints made it impossible to provide in-service training to upgrade teaching skills resulting in non-use of the new curriculum and teaching materials. Dreze and Sen note that since the introduction of structural adjustment measures in 1991, "education expenditure has declined in real terms in many states" [Dreze and Sen 1995: 123]. In particular this is reflected in the decline in absolute number of teachers in elementary schools between 1991-92 and 1992-93, when the female teachers alone who lost their jobs numbered 14,000 [Tyagi 1993: 82].

**Assessment:** In sum, all the field studies cited here have provided 'testimonials' of sorts to the appalling state of schools and schooling facilities in various parts of the country. From the condition of the buildings and chronic teacher absenteeism to dismal teacher abilities and endemic corruption, it is difficult to find one aspect of school quality that is satisfactory across the country. But above all, these studies bear testimony to the apathy of the bureaucracy and the policy-makers as rhetoric and reality so obviously continue to follow divergent paths.<sup>43</sup> A misunderstanding of the real problems and a complete lack of commitment in tackling them is obvious from the fact that policy after policy and scheme after scheme, have failed to make any appreciable impact. What it indicates is a near total absence of responsibility in the system, in effect almost a refusal to take responsibility, for ensuring the provision of this basic service, or rather of guaranteeing a fundamental right. At the same time, it also highlights the apathy of the people, who appear to passively accept the situation. However, this apparent apathy hides a more fundamental lacuna in our democracy – the failure to provide an organised means of putting pressure and demanding change. What it further points to is the continued social and political marginalisation of large sections of the population, particularly of the poor. In the absence of an institutionalised means of putting pressure, these marginalised sections find themselves wholly unable to voice their protests in an effective manner. Ironically, it is the educated with greater access to information, and knowledge of their rights, who are able to demand change, as education paves the way to greater political participation.<sup>44</sup>

In this context the contemporary debate on compulsory education takes on a different hue. While, so far, the debate has focused exclusively on the users of the facility, i.e.,

the parents, with the main questions debated being – whether or not it should be made incumbent on them to send their children to schools, and if so what would be the least coercive way of doing so – it ignores the responsibility of the providers of the facility who are as much a part of the problem if not, in fact, the bigger part.

Who should the compulsion really be on? Should the poor peasants be coerced to send their children to schools that are barely functional, or should the system be 'coerced' to provide, first, the basic minimum that they are constitutionally obliged to do? Can one seriously talk about compulsory education when the majority of the schools (at least in the rural areas) do not have the basic minimum teaching-learning facilities – one teacher for one class, toilet facilities, drinking water, in some cases not even a roof? The more pertinent questions involve how it can be made compulsory for the system to deliver and what procedures of accountability can be built in to ensure that schools function in the manner they should. Currently the responsibility centres almost entirely on parents ("parental apathy") who do not send their children to school or fail to keep them there. It ignores the fact that the right to education is a fundamental right and it is the responsibility of the state to guarantee that right.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, a more useful debate would be one that centres on the rights and obligations of the state rather than on the rights and obligations of the parents.

Nevertheless, let us explore in some detail the issue of 'parental apathy' or lack of motivation as a cause of educational deprivation, in the next section.

### (To be concluded)

### Notes

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- 1 Calculated from Government of India (1991), p 99.
- 2 The target date, initially 1960, has been postponed again and again in successive policy documents, and currently stands at 2000 AD; no doubt it will have to be postponed again.
- 3 See, for instance, Tilak (1990, 1995), Minhas (1991), Visaria et al (1993) and Dreze and Sen (1995).
- 4 An appendix of field-based studies and their main results is attached at the end.
- 5 For instance, Zambia had a literacy rate of 76 per cent, Myanmar 82 per cent, Tanzania 65.5 per cent, according to the *Human*

*Development Report*, 1996. While all these countries have lower per capita incomes than India, the literacy rate in India was much lower at 43 per cent. There are also a number of countries that are not far ahead of India in terms of per capita GNP, but have much higher literacy levels, such as Vietnam (88 per cent), Indonesia (77 per cent), Sri Lanka (88 per cent) and China (73 per cent).

6 Dreze and Sen (1995), statistical appendix, Table A3.

7 In a study of six villages in Karnataka, Reddy (1980) reported that the burden of collecting firewood falls on children. On the basis of this finding, Kulkarni and Kanbargi (1991) have concluded that "...children become vital from the standpoint of activity that determines the survival of the family, and children must (italics added) be removed from school to carry out these crucial activities" (p 126). Do these young children spend the entire day collecting firewood that they must be removed from school?

8 Most of the studies do not state (except in some cases, where it is explicitly specified) whether 'housework/household duties/domestic work' includes family labour on farms or in a household trade.

9 Bashir's study however, focuses only on children enrolled in school and as such her findings shed no light on the large number of children who are not enrolled or who have dropped out. Also her sample of children consisted exclusively of grade four pupils. She randomly picked 25 from each group of grade four pupils in each of her sample of schools.

10 "These activities" include work on family farm/business, housework and other income earning activities.

11 Note the similarity with Bashir's results which also showed girl's time input as twice that of boys. Also, based on Bashir's observations, person-days of work put in by children works out to approximately 68 per year (if a 8-hour person-day is assumed) or 90 per year (if a 6-hour person-day is assumed).

12 In another study in Maharashtra, Michael Vlassoff (1979) finds that there is little evidence of substantial contribution in time except among sons aged 17+. He concludes that "the common sense view of young children as the poor man's capital is not accurate...up to the age of 16".

A different finding is reported in Bashir's study where she measures opportunity costs of sending children to school. According to her estimates, on average, the annual opportunity costs (for pupils in the low income groups) was Rs 1,300 in the rural areas and Rs 1,200 in the urban areas. It turns out from her findings that this is roughly 40 per cent of what an adult agricultural labourer earns in a year in Tamil Nadu. The survey results also showed that the opportunity cost of a nine-year old child is about one-third the annual earnings of an adult male agricultural worker in Tamil Nadu. But despite this rather high opportunity costs, these children are all in school, contrary to what might be expected according to conventional wisdom. However, the opportunity costs thus calculated may be an overestimate, if the whole imputed value

- of children's time is treated as "opportunity costs", overlooking the point made earlier, that child labour does not necessarily compete hour-for-hour with school-time.
- 13 The 6-14 age group is a misleading age category for purposes of determining time allocation of young children, as the amount of work done by a 13-14 year old is much larger than that done by a 6-7 year old. Also for our purposes the 6-11 age group would be a more relevant category as that is the primary school age group.
  - 14 The selection of villages in Maharatna's study was based on the dominant consideration of 'relative backwardness', judged on several criteria such as access to employment, distance to nearest town, irrigation facilities, electricity, etc.
  - 15 Debi's (1996) study (part of the same series) in Orissa, on the other hand, shows that larger the number of infants and old persons (larger the dependency ratio), lower the enrolment rate as well as grade attainment of female children. However, she found that number of animals and distance to forest negatively affects male enrolment more than female.
  - 16 Majumdar's study is also part of the UNDP-GOI project.
  - 17 Kanbargi and Kulkarni found that when land owned is more than 10 acres, hired help is likely to be substituted for the child's.
  - 18 Unni, however, has not controlled for income.
  - 19 In the same vein, Tim Dyson in connection with the economic value attached to children and its effect on the demand for children, argues that, "children work because people have children, rather than people have children because children work... *Ceteris paribus*, the less the number of competing obligations (such as school) and the greater the opportunity, the more time will be spent performing such household tasks" [Dyson 1991: 95].
  - 20 This percentage varied from 74 per cent among the scheduled castes and Muslims to 92 per cent among upper caste Hindus.
  - 21 Quoted in Weiner (1994).
  - 22 Maharatna, in fact, makes a very strong case against the economic value of children to a household.
  - 23 Although this probably has more to do with gender roles than with household/family need for labour.
  - 24 The UNDP-GOI studies also show that female literacy and enrolment rates are more strongly correlated with economic variables than male enrolment and literacy rates. In particular see Krishnaji (1997).
  - 25 In some cases, such as in Kaparphora village of Madhubani district (Bihar), agricultural labourers found it difficult to pay even Rs 10 to Rs 20 per month for schooling.
  - 26 Reported in Bashir (1994).
  - 27 The ministry of human resource development and NSSO define education as 'free' when no tuition fee is paid, regardless of other payments that may have to be made in order to send a child to school.
  - 28 Quoted in Tilak (1995).
  - 29 Fees include tuition fee, exam fee, library fee, laboratory fee, gymkhana fee and other cash expenses that include capitation, donations, coaching, stationary and transport.
  - 30 For details see, Srivastava (1997); Majumdar (1996); Pande (1996); Nambissan (1997).
  - 31 According to Article 45 of the Indian Constitution, the state is directed "to provide within a period of 10 years from the commencement of this Constitution (1950) for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years".
  - 32 One exception is Operation Blackboard, which is a centrally sponsored scheme geared towards improving school quality with the specific aim of providing one blackboard, two teachers, two classrooms and some teaching aids to all schools. It was instituted in 1987-88, following the new education policy that came out in 1986.
  - 33 A fourth crucial factor is the content of the curriculum and the nature of teaching methods. This vast and challenging subject, however, is beyond the scope of this paper.
  - 34 Srivastava (1997) has calculated crude quality indicators based on regularity of functioning, teaching quality, school building and distance, measuring each on a scale of one to four.
  - 35 The figures are from Tyagi (1993). Note that the corresponding figures for rural areas are even worse. The reference year is 1986 (the results of the sixth all-India educational survey have not been published), but little progress has been made in the intervening period.
  - 36 See Geeta Gandhi Kingdon (1994) for more on subsidisation of higher levels of schooling at the expense of primary and the adverse equity effects of this cross-subsidisation.
  - 37 In the smaller schools, the senior teacher acts as the *de facto* 'headmaster'.
  - 38 For more on malpractices, scams and other ills of the government schools encountered in Andhra Pradesh see chapter 6 of Prasad's (1987) report.
  - 39 In some states a government order states that no teacher can be appointed to a school in her/his panchayat region. The reason for doing this was apparently to make it difficult for teachers to abscond during the day to their homes. However, now the problem is that the teacher has little interest in the village in which she/he teaches. In addition, for female teachers commuting to a village in which she does not reside has become a major problem.
  - 40 The quality of teacher training though is highly suspect as the training-institutes themselves are of very poor quality.
  - 41 Phase I of OB was completed in 1987-88 and covered 5,995 schools in 77 development blocks. This evaluation was carried out by the National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad, in 1992.
  - 42 Srivastava (1997) has found in his study in UP that in Ballia district, where the parents have contributed to the functioning of schools, the condition of schools is better compared with Rampur where this is not so. In particular he mentions the positive impact of pressure from local residents on the system that has resulted in bringing about needed changes.
  - 43 For more on state apathy towards education see, Prasad (1987); Sumer Kaul (1996); Myron Weiner (1994); Dreze and Sen (1995); Dreze and Gazdar (1996).
  - 44 Dreze and Sen (1995).
  - 45 Recently (May 16, 1997) the union cabinet decided to amend the Constitution making the right to free and compulsory education a fundamental right. The statutory amendment will make it a fundamental duty of every citizen who is a parent or guardian to provide the opportunity of education to children in the 6-14 age group. So far education has been part of the Directive Principles of State Policy.

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